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Review of Sparling, Heather. 2014. Reeling Roosters & Dancing Ducks: Celtic Mouth Music

Citation for published version:

Lamb, W 2015, 'Review of Sparling, Heather. 2014. Reeling Roosters & Dancing Ducks: Celtic Mouth Music' *An Naidheachd Againne: Cuairt-litir A' Chomuinn Ghàidhealaich Ameireaganaich*.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

An Naidheachd Againne: Cuairt-litir A' Chomuinn Ghàidhealaich Ameireaganaich

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Lamb, W. (2015). Leimheas air Sparling, Heather. 2014. Reeling Roosters & Dancing Ducks: Celtic Mouth Music (Sydney: Cape Breton University Press). An Naidheachd Againne: Cuairt-litir A' Chomuinn Ghàidhealaich Ameireaganaich

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Sparling, Heather. 2014. *Reeling Roosters & Dancing Ducks: Celtic Mouth Music* (Sydney: Cape Breton University Press)

Fad còrr is ceud bliadhna, cha robh ann ach aon leabhar ri fhaighinn air òrain dannsaidh nan Gàidheal; 's e sin *Puirt a Beul* (1901) le Keith Tormod Dòmhnallach. Tha dà chloich air a' chàrn a-neist agus an t-Oll. Heather Sparling air *Reeling Roosters & Dancing Ducks* (2014) a chur far comhair. An taca ri leabhar an Dòmhnallaich, chan e cruinneachadh ciùil a tha seo, ach foillseachadh sgoileireil a chòrdas ris a' mhòr-shluagh cuideachd. 'S e prìomh-amas Sparling a bhith a' mìneachadh eachdraidh agus co-theacs cleachdadh phort-à-beul bhon fhianais sgrìobhte agus bhon obair-làraich aice fhèin ann an Ceap Breatainn. 'S e sgoilear eitneòlas-ciùil a th' innte aig Oilthigh Cheap Breatainn, agus dh'ionnsaich i a' Ghàidhlig gu fileantachd. Mar sin, tha i air leth freagarrach a bhith gar treòrachadh tron raon seo.

Tha an leabhar fhèin snasta agus sgrìobhte ann an dòigh a thàlaidheas caochladh seòrsa leughadair, sgoilearan agus fileantaich maraon cho math ri daoine a tha tachairt ri ceòl na h-Alba airson a' chiad uair. Anns a' chiad dà chaibideil, an dèidh a bhith a' mìneachadh gu dè th' ann am puirt-à-beul agus an luach dhuinn, tha Sparling a' toirt sùil air an tàrmachadh, agus an càirdeas do dh'fhidhlearachd is pìobaireachd. Tha deasbad car toinnte agus buaireasach ceangailte ri ciamar agus cuine thàinig iad gu bith, agus tha Sparling a' toirt dhuinn cunntas cothromach. Dhomhsa, 's e seo an t-earann as luachmhoire dhen leabhar. Ge-tà, bha mi iomagaineach uaireannan gu robh i ag aideachadh air an dara làimh nach eil sinn cinnteach – air sgàth cion fianais – cuine a nochd iad (t.d. 95, 312), ach air an làimh eile a' dol leis a' bharail nach fhaod iad a bhith nas sine na meadhan na h-ochdamh linn deug (t.d. 314). Tha caochladh cuir air clò Chaluim. Co-dhiubh, dhèilig i gu h-èifeachdach ri stòireannan faoine gun do nochd na puirt mar chleachdadh dìomhair gus danns' a chumail an dèidh na h-ionnstramaidean a bhith air an losgadh aig ministearan is sagairt ro-dhiadhaidh. Tha i a' leigeil fhaicinn gum faod sinn a bhith amharasach mu chuid mhòr nan naidheachdan seo.

Anns na h-earrannan mu dheireadh, tha Sparling a' ceangail port-à-beul ri poilitigs ath-bheothachadh na Gàidhlig. Tha uallach air cuid nach tuig luchd-labhairt ùra gu bheil fad a bharrachd ri rùrachadh ann an cultar na Gàidhlig seach òrain bheaga, luideach a ghabhas ionnsachadh gun mòran spàirn. Na dhèidh sin, tha Sparling a' sealltainn gum faod aobhar sònraichte a bhith aig puirt san àm ri teachd: 'They serve to connect various components of Gaelic culture and therefore demonstrate the necessity of the language's survival for the proper maintenance of Gaelic culture as a whole' (t.d. 301). Is dòcha nach eil iad cho luideach sin aig a' cheann thall!

Tha an leabhar a' lìonadh beàrn chudromach ann an sgoilearachd na Gàidhlig, agus mholainn rud no dhà gu buannachd an ath-fhoillseachaidh, ma thig an latha. Bhiodh mapaichean feumail, agus b' fheàrr de e sùil eile a thoirt air litreachadh na Gàidhlig agus cuid dhe na h-eadar-theangachaidhean. Feumaidh mi aideachadh gu bheil mi mì-chofhurtail leis an fho-thiotail *Celtic Mouth Music*. Bha dùil leam gum biodh eisimpleirean ann de 'cheòl beòil' Cuimris, Breatnais no

Còrnais ach chan eil sgeul orra. 'S e a th' againn an seo ach tuairisgeul ealanta air cleachdadh sònraichte Gàidhlig na h-Alba (agus na h-Èireann, gu ìre), agus chanainn gum biodh e na b' fheàrr am facal 'Celtic' a sheachnadh, air na h-adhbharan a tha Sparling fhèin a' toirt dhuinn san ro-ràdh (t.d. 11-18). Air a shon sin, tha mi deimhinne gum faigh duine sam bith a thogas an leabhar seo tlachd agus fiosrachadh ùr às, agus tha fhios gum bi fèill mhòr air.

Eadar-theangachadh

For over one hundred years, only one book could be found on the topic of Gaelic dance songs: *Puirt a Beul* (1901) by Keith Norman Macdonald. There are two cobbles on the carn now, with Dr Heather Sparling's publication of *Reeling Roosters and Dancing Ducks* (2014) [which takes its name from the lines of the famous port that begins *Ruidhlidh na coilich dhubha / is dannsaidh na tunnagan* ('Tha black cockerels will reel / and the ducks will dance')]. Compared to Macdonald's book, this isn't a music collection as such, but an academic monograph that will also appeal to a wide readership. Sparling's main aim is to explain the history and contextual practice of puirt from written evidence as well as from fieldwork that she conducted in Cape Breton. As an ethnomusicologist at the University of Cape Breton and a fluent Gaelic speaker, she is an eminently suitable person to lead us through this subject area.

The book itself is orderly and attractive, and written in a way that will appeal many types of readers; scholars and Gaelic speakers alike, as well as those who are encountering Scottish music for the first time. In the first two chapters, after explaining what puirt-à-beul are and their significance, Sparling considers their origins, and their relationship with fiddle and pipe traditions. The debate over how and when puirt came to be is involved and slightly polemic, but Sparling provides a balanced account of the various positions. However, she seems unsure of her own position at times, admitting that the dearth of evidence prevents us from knowing when they began (pp. 95, 312), whilst adopting the stance that they are a mid-eighteenth century innovation (p. 314). In any case, she deals effectively with the daft theory that puirt arose in response to the burning of musical instruments by over-zealous priests and ministers. She exposes most of the associated anecdotes as apocrypha.

In her final sections, Sparling turns to the connection between puirt and the politics of Gaelic revitalisation. Some worry that new speakers of the language fail to appreciate that there is much more to the culture than facile, silly wee songs. On the other hand, Sparling suggests that puirt may have an important role to play in the time to come: 'They serve to connect various components of Gaelic culture and therefore demonstrate the necessity of the language's survival for the proper maintenance of Gaelic culture as a whole' (p. 301). Perhaps they aren't so silly after all.

The book fills a major gap in Gaelic scholarship, and I would suggest a few things towards the next printing should it occur. Maps would be useful, and it would be worthwhile revisiting the Gaelic spelling and English translations. I am also uncomfortable with the sub-title *Celtic Mouth Music*. I would have expected examples of mouth music in Welsh, Breton or Cornish [to justify it], but none are

in evidence. What we have here is an accomplished description of a unique practice of the Scottish Gaels (and those of Ireland, to a lesser extent), and I would eschew the word 'Celtic' for the very reasons that Sparling herself advances in the introduction (see pp. 11-18). Despite these small reservations, I guarantee that anyone who lifts the book will take pleasure and new knowledge from it, and it deserves the warmest of receptions.